

Sufis, Scholars and Scapegoats: Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī (d. 1905) and the Deobandi Critique of Sufism

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The Deoband *madrasa* of north India is arguably the most intellectually influential and historically consequential center of Islamic learning outside of the Middle East. Founded in 1867 in the wake of a failed revolt against British rule a decade earlier, the Deoband *madrasa* aimed to reassert Muslim intellectual prominence amidst a sharp decline in Islamic political power in the Indian subcontinent. While the mission of Deoband in its nascent stages was tailored to the needs of Muslims in nineteenth-century north India, today the Deobandi curriculum has been copied or adapted by thousands of *madrasas* in countries throughout the world, ranging from Pakistan to Bangladesh, from Malaysia to South Africa and the United Kingdom. In recent years, some journalists and scholars have noted that some Taliban have studied in Deobandi institutions, bringing *madrasas* in general and Deoband in particular under close scrutiny.¹ Despite this sudden attention lavished on Deoband in various media, both its founding figures and contemporary global scope remain woefully understudied in European and American academies.

Cautioning against the facile placement of Deoband under the rubrics of ‘fundamentalism’ or ‘Islamism’, Barbara Metcalf identifies Deoband as an example of “traditionalist” activism that sets it apart from other forms of Islamic

activism, such as that of the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt or the Jamaat-i Islami of Pakistan.² Deobandis typically do not espouse a global political agenda or operate within the framework of the nation-state; rather, they advocate the continuous fashioning of moral selves through study of the classical sources of Islamic knowledge and a rigorous adherence to the *sunna* of the Prophet Muḥammad.

It is ironic that Deobandis have been among the most vociferous critics of Sufism, as Sufism is historically the preeminent source in Islam of the very interior self-formation that they have advocated. Many of Deoband's early figures, who leveled some of the most trenchant critiques of Sufism, were themselves Sufis. How has Deoband negotiated a critique of Sufism while thoroughly embedded within Sufi discourses of the Indian subcontinent?

This paper provides one perspective on this question by examining the writings of a seminal figure of the Deoband school, Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī (1829–1905), focusing on his collection of his legal responsa (*fatāwa*, sing. *fatwa*) in Urdu, the *Fatāwa-yi Rashīdiyya*. I begin by examining how the British presence in the nineteenth century changed the context for the implementation of Islamic legal norms and thus altered the way that *fatāwa* were understood and issued by *muftīs* like Gangohī. Next, I will provide some perspectives on reformist critiques of Sufism prior to Gangohī, primarily in the movement of Sayyid Aḥmad Barelwī (1786–1831) and in the writings of that movement's propagandist, Shāh Muḥammad Ismā'īl (1779–1831), and identify how Gangohī adapted the latter's ideas to his own programme of reform. Finally, I will look at his collection of *fatāwa* related to Sufism, in particular his *fatāwa* regarding shrine-based practices, and will draw his own thought into relief by contrasting his writings on shrine-based Sufism with that of his revered Sufi master, Hājī Imdādullah Muhājir al-Makkī (1817–1899), from whom Gangohī departed in myriad ways. Finally, lest the title of this paper give the impression that there was a single, unified 'Deobandi critique of Sufism', I stress at the outset that the Deobandi movement, to the extent that it has been a coherent 'movement' at all, has encompassed a wide spectrum of attitudes towards Sufism, ranging from outright rejection to cautious embrace. I offer Gangohī's perspective as one among many, but one singled out by Gangohī's immense stature within Deoband and his impact on the movement's origins.

Born in 1829 in the North Indian *qaṣbah* of Gangoh, Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī was a Sufi of the Indian Chishtī order.³ He went to Delhi in his youth to study hadith with Shāh 'Abd al-Ghanī (d. 1868).⁴ Both Gangohī and the co-founder of Deoband, Muḥammad Qāsim Nānautvī (1833–1877), studied Sufism at the feet of Hājī Imdādullah.⁵ According to one source, Gangohī progressed from the status of *murīd* to *khalīfa* in a mere forty days, after

which he returned to Gangoh where he sought to eliminate devotional practices at the tomb of his ancestor, the Sufi saint Shaykh ‘Abd al-Quddūs Gangohī (d. 1537).⁶ According to some sources, he fought alongside his master Imdādullah at Shamli during the 1857 revolt, spent six months in a British jail, and began a career teaching hadith after his release.⁷ Although not officially involved with Deoband until 1879, when he became chancellor (*sarparast*), from the outset Gangohī was intimately involved with shaping the mission and curriculum of the school, insisting on rigorous studies in the ‘revealed’ sciences (*manqūlāt*) and deemphasizing the ‘rational’ sciences (*ma‘qūlāt*), such as logic and philosophy.⁸

In the aftermath of the abortive revolt against the British, many of Imdādullah’s students retreated from political activity and looked to rebuild the Muslim body politic from within, indicting popular practices surrounding the tombs of Indian Sufi masters as a source of *bid‘a*, practices thought to contravene the prophetic *sunna*. This is the framework in which we must locate Gangohī’s *Fatāwa-yi Rashīdiyya*. His collection of *fatāwa* reveals the extent to which Sufism was an ongoing point of contention for the Deobandis; nearly half deal directly with ritual aspects of Sufism: reciting pious ‘remembrances’ (*dhikr*) of God aloud, visiting saints’ tombs (*ziyārat*), visualizing one’s *shaykh* (*taṣawwur-i shaykh*) as a meditative practice, celebrating the death anniversary (*‘urs*) of a saint, creating and using protective amulets (*ta‘wīdh*), reciting the Fatihah at certain occasions, listening to musical assemblies (*samā‘*), and so on. His judgments concerning long and well-entrenched Indian Sufi traditions did not emerge in a vacuum; rather, the political fate of the Muslims in eighteenth and nineteenth century India and its impact on the institutions of Islamic law are inseparable from the creation of Sufism as a moral scapegoat.

Islamic Law after British Dominance

After 1765, when the East India Company was granted the status of a “Diwan of the Mughal Emperor” and acquired control over tax collection in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, the context for the practice of Islamic law began to change dramatically.⁹ In 1772 the Regulating Act of the British East India Company determined that in “civil” matters of law, the judicial system would adhere to the “law of the Koran with respect to Mahomedans.”¹⁰ However, because the Company regarded Indian *muftīs* and *qāḍīs* to be fickle and unreliable, they followed the advice of William Jones (d. 1794) in seeking to create a “complete Digest of Hindu and Mohammedan laws” that would render the “Pandits and Maulavis” superfluous.¹¹ Effectively, the British sought to recast the institution of Islamic law in India in the image of British common law, relying principally on ‘canonical’ *texts* rather than the face-to-face context

in which Muslim *qāḍīs* typically made legal decisions. For their purposes, the *Hedayat* of Marghinani formed almost the sole foundation of what the British called “Anglo-Muhammadan law”. In the introduction to his 1791 translation of the *Hedayat*, Charles Hamilton posited, at once, the immutability of Islamic law’s textual sources and the fickle caprice of the Muslim jurists who interpret it:

[I]t is impossible, in the infinite variety of human affairs, that the text of the KORAN, or the traditionary precepts of the Prophet, would extend to every particular case, or strictly suit all possible emergencies. Hence the necessity of *Mooftees*, whose particular office it is to compound the law and apply it to cases. The *uncertainty* of this science, in its judicial operation, is unhappily proverbial in all countries. In some, which enjoy the advantage of an established legislature, competent at all times to alter or amend, to make or revoke laws, as the change of manners may require, or incidental occurrences render necessary, this uncertainty arises pretty much from the unavoidable mutability in the principles of decision. Of the *Mussulman* code, on the contrary, the principles are fixed; and being intimately and inseparably blended with the religion of the people, must remain so, as long as they shall endure.¹²

As Scott Kugle has aptly stated, “British scrutiny of Islamic law consisted of a two-fold dynamic: first, the British assumed that law exists in a formal code which they could administer, and second, if such a code did not exist, they assumed the right to alter legal practices in order to form one . . . The British further assumed that all Indians acted out of inherent religiosity and orthodoxy, so the codes of religious law were sufficient to adjudicate in all their crises.”¹³

The practice of issuing *fatāwa*, or *iftā*, expanded to fill the gap that the British colonial system had created in the administration of Muslim personal law.¹⁴ By the first decade of twentieth century, virtually every Muslim political organization had a *dār al-iftā*. The *Dār al-Iftā* at Deoband claimed to have issued over 100,000 *fatāwa*.¹⁵ By Gangohī’s era, the mid- and late-nineteenth century, *muftīs* began to issue legal opinions on the authority of a particular *madrasa*, and issued *fatāwa* in substantially larger numbers than previously through widespread use of the incipient technology of printing in India.¹⁶ The *Fatāwa-yi Rashīdiyya* is one such compilation, and it is in this shifting legal environment in which we must locate Gangohī’s text. By and large his *fatāwa* were solicited by individual Muslims, responding to their questions about proper belief and practice. As Metcalf writes, “*Fatāwa* in a Muslim state were traditionally given by a court official, the *muftī*, for the guidance of the *qāḍī* or judge. Now in India they were given directly to believers, who welcomed them as a form of guidance in the changed circumstances of the day.”¹⁷ And

unlike *muftīs* of the past, Gangohī and his generation of *muftīs* rarely cited works of *fiqh*, and often gave their *fatāwa* without any explanation of their legal reasoning at all, although sometimes Gangohī would provide a relevant quotation from the Qurʾān or hadith.

It is worth contrasting this collection to one of the most important pre-colonial works of Islamic law in the subcontinent, the *Fatāwa-yi ʿĀlamgīrī*, to understand how Gangohī's collection stands out as a uniquely colonial-era work. Completed during the reign of Aurangzeb from 1667 to 1675, the *Fatāwa-yi ʿĀlamgīrī* is not a collection of *fatāwa*, unlike the *Fatāwa-yi Rashīdiyya*, but a legal treatise on Hanafī *fiqh*. Its selection and arrangement of subjects are modeled after Marghinani's *Hidaya*, with chapters on judicial proceedings and decrees, legal forms, legal devices, rules of inheritance, economic transactions, treatment of slaves, land, etc. In short, the emphasis on aspects of piety, belief, worship, and prayer found in Gangohī's *fatāwa* is far removed from the more worldly, practical matters addressed in the *Fatāwa-yi ʿĀlamgīrī*. The shift from concern over the pragmatic exigencies of Mughal rule to the late- and post-Mughal concern over matters of private faith and piety is symptomatic of Indian Muslims' public sense of moral crisis.¹⁸

Reform in the Nineteenth Century: Muḥammad Ismāʿīl's Critique of Sufism

This sense of crisis formed the backdrop for a rise of self-conscious 'reformist' movements across the Islamic world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This has been explored at length elsewhere,¹⁹ but here I follow a recent definition of 'reform' as referring to "projects whose specific focus is the bringing into line of religious beliefs and practices with [what are interpreted as] the core foundations of Islam, by avoiding and purging out innovation, accretion and the intrusion of 'local custom'."²⁰ 'Reform' here is best understood as a heuristic category that subsumes a multitude of movements, agendas, and ideologies bearing strong family resemblances. These emerged across such a wide swath of the Islamic world over such a long period of time that one may legitimately question the utility of 'reform' as an analytic category. Its use is partly justifiable as a translation of the term *iṣlāḥ* that self-proclaimed reformists often use to describe their own agendas.²¹

The framework within which it is necessary to understand the *Fatāwa-yi Rashīdiyya* is the reformist activism that preceded the 1857 revolt. Foremost among the movements that arose at this time, the movement of Sayyid Aḥmad Barelwī (d. 1831) aimed to forestall what he perceived as a downslide into decadence, immorality, and ignorance of the Sharīʿa. Popular, shrine-based Sufism became an easy target for his reformist polemics.²² Sayyid Aḥmad was born in 1786 in the town of Rai Bareilly in Awadh. He toured the Ganges delta

valley from 1818 to 1821, went on the *hāj*j with some 600 disciples from 1821 to 1824, and began raising the call to *jibād* against the Sikhs upon his return to India.²³ In 1831 Sayyid Aḥmad and his compatriots were killed at Balakot fighting against Sikh armies under Maharaja Sher Singh. For his followers, his death only amplified his mythic status, and through aggressive printing in Urdu, the movement of Sayyid Aḥmad reached a popular audience; the works of the movement's main propagandist, Muḥammad Ismā'īl Shahīd (d. 1831), were read out loud to throngs of Muslims in small villages across North India.²⁴

Both Sayyid Aḥmad and Muḥammad Ismā'īl, like Gangohī after them, participated in the centuries-old discourse on Sufism in the subcontinent at the same time that they made critical interventions into it. Sayyid Aḥmad and Muḥammad Ismā'īl underwent initiations into multiple Sufi lineages, including the Naqshbandī, Qādirī, and Chishtī *silsilas*. Sayyid Aḥmad claimed multiple Uwaysī initiations (initiations by way of dreams or visions) from prominent Sufi shaykhs, including such luminaries as 'Abd al-Qādir Jīlānī, Baha al-Dīn Naqshbandī, and Quṭb al-Dīn Bakhtiyār Kākī. Consisting largely of Sayyid Aḥmad's oral teachings (*malfūẓat*), the movement's first manifesto was the Sufi treatise *al-Ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*, written first in Persian by Muḥammad Ismā'īl and Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ḥayy, and later translated into Urdu.²⁵ But the gold standard of Indian reformist manifestos was Muḥammad Ismā'īl's *Taqwīyyat al-Imān*, written in 1826. The central argument of this text is simple but has immense and complex repercussions for the religio-political imaginary of South Asian Muslims: *tawḥīd*, the absolute unity of God, is diametrically opposed to *shirk*, associating another person or thing in any way with God. *Sunna*, the morally sanctioned path of right belief and conduct laid out in the words and deeds of the Prophet, is diametrically opposed to *bid'a*, anything that diverges from the *sunna*.

Muḥammad Ismā'īl identifies four fundamental forms of *shirk*: association with God in knowledge (*isbrāk fī l-'ilm*), association with God in power (*isbrāk fī-t taṣarruf*), association with God in worship (*isbrāk fī l-'ibādat*), and association with God in matters of custom or everyday life (*isbrāk fī-l 'ādat*).²⁶ Closely aligned with *shirk* is the offense of *bid'a*, conceived in three ways: first, as a practice that directly opposes or invalidates *sunna*; second, as a practice done with same intent or regularity of the *sunna* but not part of it — in other words, creating a kind of false or counter-religion alongside the *sunna*; or third, making a merely permissible act an obligatory one.²⁷

Muḥammad Ismā'īl's reformist project operates on at least two levels. First, he articulates a stark and radically polarized vision of divine sovereignty in which human beings, including all prophets and Sufi saints, are utterly powerless before God's majesty, thereby undercutting the very possibility of saintly intercession between God and humankind. Affirming the notion of

imkān-i nazīr, Muḥammad Ismāʿīl argues that God could replace the Prophet Muḥammad with another Prophet, or create scores of new Prophets. “Verily the power of this Shāh of Shāhs is so great,” he writes, “that in an instant, solely by pronouncing the command ‘Be!’ God can create millions of prophets, saints, djinn, and angels equal to Gabriel and Muḥammad, or in a single breath, can turn the whole universe upside down and bestow upon it a wholly new creation.”²⁸ In defining sovereignty in such absolutist terms, he collapses a nuanced spiritual hierarchy within Sufism that regards some especially pious Muslims as being close to God, and therefore able to intercede with God on behalf of others. Muḥammad Ismāʿīl’s ontology, in other words, nullifies the very possibility of saintly intercession (*shafāʿat*). Second, he articulates a strict polarity between a pure ‘religion’, on the one hand, and the impure domain of culture on the other, consigning much of Sufi popular practices surrounding the tombs of saints to the latter category. The problem with these practices is that they impinge on the sphere of ‘religion’; that is, they threaten to corrupt it, or more sinisterly, to imitate it, to create a faux-religion alongside true religion.²⁹

In the *Fatāwa-yi Rashīdiyya*, Gangohī’s praise for the *Taqwīyyat al-Imān* is unreserved: “*Taqwīyyat al-Imān* is a magnificent, utterly true work, strengthening and reforming the faith (*quwwat o iṣlāḥ-i imān*), and the entire meaning of the Qurʾān and *ḥadīth* is contained in it.”³⁰ Gangohī uses Sufi appellations to extol Muḥammad Ismāʿīl, declaring him one of the ‘friends of God’ (*wālī Allāh*) and averring that the *Taqwīyyat al-Imān* contains the “essence of Islam” (*ʿayn-i Islām*).³¹ Despite his unqualified praise, other *fatāwa* in the collection reveal just how controversial Muḥammad Ismāʿīl’s propositions were. Several *mustaftis*, those requesting *fatāwa*, inquire whether it is permissible to call Muḥammad Ismāʿīl a *kāfir*,³² and in fact several prominent ‘Ulamā’ under the guidance of Faḍl al-Ḥāq Khairābādī (d. 1861) did exactly that.³³ Gangohī, expectedly, condemns *takfīr* against Muḥammad Ismāʿīl with the justification that he is a *wālī Allāh*. He echoes his intellectual predecessor in still other ways, defending the controversial principles of *imkān-i kidhb*, the notion that God is capable of lying, and *imkān-i nazīr*, that God could create other prophets on par with Muḥammad, offering the explanation, like Muḥammad Ismāʿīl, that God is capable but will not do so.³⁴ And like Muḥammad Ismāʿīl he steadfastly denies that Muḥammad had ‘knowledge of the unseen’ (*ʿilm-i ghayb*), a staple of Sufi perceptions of the Prophet as a man of unparalleled knowledge of this world and the next.³⁵ Gangohī recommends that a certain *mustafti* consult Muḥammad Ismāʿīl’s work on the problem of saintly intercession, ratifying his views on *shafāʿat*.³⁶ Whereas God has promised the ‘major intercession’ (*shafāʿat kubra*) on the Day of Judgment, he explains, no one has his permission for any other form

of intercession.³⁷ Finally, Gangohī endorses the polarized vision of divine sovereignty found in the *Taqwīyyat al-Imān*. One *mustafī* wants to know the meaning of a passage from *Taqwīyyat al-Imān* in which Muḥammad Ismāʿīl likens the difference between God and humankind as that between a king and a *chamar*. Gangohī, in turn, makes a comparison between a potter and a pot: the potter can create the pot but also has the power to break it at will, and there can be no equality whatsoever between the potter and his or her creation.³⁸

It is clear, then, that Gangohī positioned himself as an intellectual successor to Muḥammad Ismāʿīl. But like Sayyid Aḥmad and Muḥammad Ismāʿīl, and markedly unlike his Wahhabi contemporaries, Gangohī did not reject Sufism outright.³⁹ On the contrary, Sufism was an indelible part of Indian Islamic traditions. If, as we will see, Gangohī elevated the interior, personal aspects of Sufi piety far above Sufism's popular manifestations, he also saw himself as helping to save Sufism from its dalliance with *shirk* and *kufṛ*, two words that are as ubiquitous in his *fatāwa* as they are in the work of Muḥammad Ismāʿīl.

Sufism and its Discontents in the *Fatāwa-yi Rashīdiyya*

The third section of this paper makes several broad observations about Gangohī's stance towards Sufism in the *Fatāwa-yi Rashīdiyya*. First, for Gangohī, Sufism and the Sharīʿa are fundamentally the same thing, with Sufism being the intensification and internalization of the ethos of the Sharīʿa. However, in this judgment he assimilates Sufism to his normative vision of Islamic law, decisively rejecting Sufism's antinomian strains. Secondly, Gangohī fully acknowledges the efficacy of Sufi ritual practices, including meditative techniques and those that take place in the vicinity of tombs, but believes that their popularization distracts the masses from the Sharīʿa. Thirdly, many Sufi practices may have been permissible at one point, but the political and social context of British rule and perceived decline of Muslim vitality dictate that contemporary Muslims shun such practices. Fourthly, Gangohī extends the reasoning found in Muḥammad Ismāʿīl's work that articulates perceived cultural distinctions along 'religious' lines, so that the act of a Muslim wearing 'Hindu' clothing becomes anathema. Gangohī often reasons that such acts are shameful because of their 'resemblance' (*mushabbah*) to Christians' and Hindus' practices. Fifth, it is important to note that Gangohī did not prohibit visiting saints' tombs in principle, but only on prescribed occasions or for prescribed purposes other than honoring God, or if the visit entails prostrating before the shrine, adorning it, and the like. For Gangohī, as with Muḥammad Ismāʿīl, all of these impinge on the sanctity of

the *sunna* by virtue of ‘resembling’ or ‘mimicing’ the normativity of religiously sanctioned acts.

Marc Gaborieau has proposed a four-part typology for understanding the juridical controversies surrounding Sufi practices, which applies in each instance to Gangohī’s *fatāwa*. There are four domains of ritual action — namely, rituals of prescribed places and times; ritual gestures; words and incantations; and offerings and sacrifices — that reformists attempted to regulate by demarcating a strict boundary between ritual actions legitimated by the Qur’ān and *sunna* and those that fall beyond the purview of legitimacy.⁴⁰

Concerning the first, *rituals of place and time*, reformists often accepted only the location-bound ritual of *ḥājj* and the time-bound ritual of *ṣalāt* as legitimate practices. This excluded, among other things, staples of popular Sufism in the subcontinent, including pilgrimage to tombs (*ziyārat*) and the celebration of saints’ death anniversaries (‘*urs*). Gangohī uniformly declares that such celebrations and local pilgrimages are impermissible, reasoning that in the distant past such celebrations may have been permissible when the collective morality of the *umma* was greater, but today the ‘corruption of the time’ (*fasād al-zamān*) dictates a stricter demarcation of permissible and impermissible acts.⁴¹ In one *fatwa* responding to a query about the legality of birth and death (*mawḥūd o ‘urs*) celebrations, Gangohī writes, “In connection to birth celebrations, although in this matter there may be nothing directly against the law, care and solicitude are necessary because such celebrations are not proper in this age. And in regard to death anniversaries, the answer is that just as many things that were once permissible (*mubāḥ*) at a certain time are now prohibited, birth and death gatherings are just the same.”⁴²

Reformists likewise drew clear boundaries between permissible and impermissible *ritual gestures*, the second domain of ritual practice in this typology, holding that the only legitimate gesture is prostration towards Mecca in the act of prayer. Prostration towards any other direction, for instance a saint’s tomb, or circumambulation of anything other than the Ka’ba, was strictly interdicted. Gangohī explains his position on this matter in a *fatwa* on the circumambulation of tombs, relying yet again on the logic that formerly permissible practices are now too risky to be acceptable, but adding the further point that such acts bear a disturbing ‘resemblance’ (*mushabbah*) to non-Muslim practices. At the same time, he calls for restraint in calling the perpetrators of such acts *kāfirs*:

Circumambulation of the tombs of pious ancestors or the saints is *bid’a* without the slightest doubt because its occurrence is not found in the past. But these days, the contestation (*ikhtilāf*) concerns whether this *bid’a* is of the permissible or the forbidden variety. In the past this was

not the case, but now it is a matter of ethics (*akhlāq*) whether or not to regard this as *bid'ā* or as an acceptable practice. In some works of *fiqh*, it is considered permissible, but the correct juridical ruling is that it is not, since it necessitates resemblance with the idol-worshippers, who engage in the same activity around their idols. Furthermore, according to the legal norm (*sharʿ*), circumambulation has been specified for the Kaʿba and to suggest a resemblance between the grave of a saint and the Kaʿba is a bad thing. But if someone engages in this practice, to call him a *kāfir* and push him outside the domain of Islam is very undesirable. In the same way, to label the one who pronounced *takfīr* as a *kāfir* is also bad.⁴³

Reformists policed a third domain of ritual practice, *words and incantations*, forbidding prayers, invocations, and oaths addressed to anyone other than God. For Gangohī one ought not invoke any other name besides God's in a prayer or an oath.⁴⁴ Seeking help from and petitioning the deceased saints (*abl-i qubūr*) is impermissible in every respect,⁴⁵ nor is one permitted to seek out spiritual refuge in anyone or anything other than God.⁴⁶

A final ritual dimension is that of making *offerings and sacrifices*. Gangohī uniformly equates lighting candles at shrines with polytheism and Hindu idolatry,⁴⁷ and regards leaving food at tombs in most cases and setting up lights at tombs as *ḥarām*.⁴⁸ Gangohī specifically forbids leaving food at tombs on an appointed day or a specific occasion, a line of reasoning similar to Muḥammad Ismāʿīl's belief that anything done with a prescribed time encroaches upon the *sunna*: "Distributing food on an appointed day is without the slightest doubt an innovation, even though one may still incur divine favors, and a fixed *ʿurs* is against the *sunna*, and therefore an innovation. Distributing food only at an unappointed time is permissible."⁴⁹

Most of these multifarious practices fall under the rubric of 'Sufism' as it was understood in the mid-nineteenth century. Nevertheless, Gangohī denies that such practices have anything to do with 'Sufism' at all, arguing instead that Sufism is grounded in the normative moral order of the Shariʿa. I argue here that Gangohī's version of Sufism is a truncated one, reduced largely to personal morality, disciplining of the body and reverence for God and the Prophet. It is a 'Sufism' largely bereft of the human, 'this-worldly' relationships between Sufis and their disciples, and devalues the immense respect and honor reserved for such figures in poetry, commemorative festivals and pilgrimage to their tombs.

Gangohī subscribed to the notion that knowledge of Sufism was completely synonymous with knowledge of proper, 'orthodox' belief and practice. Knowledge of the Sufi path (*ṭarīqat*) and knowledge of normative

Islamic practice (*sharīʿat*) are, for Gangohī, the very same thing; they are indistinguishable for Gangohī, insofar as the former is an internalization of the latter. “Both [*ṭarīqat* and *sharīʿat*] are one. Outwardly, it is a matter of performing the *sharīʿat*. When the rules of the *sharīʿat* enter the heart, naturally they will remain. This is *ṭarīqat*. Both are derived from the rules of the Qurʾān and hadith.”⁵⁰

One of the longest *fatāwa* in the collection, “On the difference between Sufism and Sharīʿa,” demonstrates this point well. Here, the *mustaftī* repeatedly inquires why Sufis and ‘Ulamā’ have come to represent dueling, competing cultures of Muslim piety. The *fatwa* is so revealing about popular perceptions of Sufism and Sharīʿa that it is worth reproducing it at length here:

Question: Are Sharīʿa, which some call ‘knowledge of the book’ (*‘ilm-i safīna*), and Sufism, which some call ‘knowledge of the heart’ (*‘ilm-i sīna*), one and the same thing, or two different things? If they are one, then why not say that ‘purification’ (*tazkiya*) comes only through external knowledge (*‘ilm-i zāhiri*) and, why not stipulate that every ‘ālim is a Sufi and every Sufi an ‘ālim? As for one who is a *muṭtabid* of external knowledge [i.e. *fiqh*] why can’t he engage in *ijtibād* within Sufism?

For instance, consider that Ḥaẓrat ‘Azīm Ṣāhib is an *imām* of the Sharīʿa, and Ḥaẓrat Muʿin al-Dīn Chishtī is a ‘*muṭtabid*’ of Sufism. One never hears anything to contradict this. On the other hand, considering the great Sufis who instruct in such things as feats of mental labor (*ashgāl-i ifkār*), remembrances (*azkār*), meditations (*murāqabāt*), vocal *zīkr* (*dhikr-i jāhr*), *zīkr* of contracting the vein (*dhikr-i raḡ*), visualization of the master (*taṣawwur-i shaykh*), keeping rhythms (*dharbayn lagānā*), seclusion for forty days (*chilla*), holding the breath (*ḥabs-i dam*), and so on, one never hears that Imam Azim Sahib also instructs in matters of this sort, or that Khwaja Sahib [Muʿin al-Dīn Chishtī] engages in *ijtibād* over some matter of Sharīʿa, or that some imam or *muṭtabid* goes to Khwaja Sahib, or that some Sufi goes to an imam.

In fact some ‘Ulamā’ completely deny the existence of Sufism. I don’t mean to say that Sufism is opposed to Sharīʿa, or Imām Ṣāhib did not understand Sufism, or that Khwāja Ṣāhib did not understand Sharīʿa . . . Within Sufism, there exist thousands of ‘Ulamā’ and great scholars who have a Sufi initiation, yet among the throngs of ‘Ulamā’ there is no knowledge of this, including Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim Muhaddith, who were great scholars in their hadith criticism. But there was no Sufi order that we can trace back to them. For in fact, if Sufism and Sharīʿa were the same, and one person is a Sufi, and another is an ‘ālim, what does that mean? Imām Muḥammad Ghazālī was a Shafīʿī, and Hazrat Khwāja Muʿin al-Dīn Chishtī was a Hanbalī, and Bare Pir Sahib [ʿAbd al-Qādir Jīlānī] was a Hanbalī . . .

Answer: Why is your question so long? Knowledge of Shari'a and knowledge of Sufism are the very same thing, and Shari'a and Sufism are also the same. When one knows the precept of Shari'a, one attains knowledge of Shari'a. And when one knows the essence of this precept, that is knowledge of Sufism. To perform a duty or necessary deed against the will of the lower self is called an action in line with Shari'a. When purity (*ikhlās*) and love for the reality of God completely encompass the depths of the heart, that is called Sufism. So long as knowledge and practice are in conflict with one another, Shari'a must dominate. And when the conflict dissipates, that is Sufism. The difference between them is the difference between a beginning and an end. He who says the source of both is one, he is right. And he who makes a distinction between the two, he is also right. The meaning of both is the same. Likewise, the master jurists were involved in Sufism. But they did not involve themselves in the investigation of this field of knowledge. The external form of the Shari'a was an obligation, so they understood its explanation to be more important. They were complete experts of Sufism, because Sufism is substantiated by and derived from the hadith, and most masters within Sufism were 'Ulamā', but were not busy with investigating Shari'a. It was sufficient that they be part of a group of 'Ulamā' who wrote about the internal explanations of Shari'a. Some of the Sufis possessed enough knowledge about *fiqh* but were also specialists and scholars of the subtleties of Sufism, and thus they did not involve themselves in both fields of knowledge . . . Without its justification within the precepts of the Shari'a, no act is acceptable. And without the acceptance of an act, the status of sainthood cannot be achieved.⁵¹

In his response, Gangohī does not assimilate Shari'a to Sufism; he assimilates Sufism to Shari'a. In positing a higher synthesis between the two, he implicitly privileges the normative moral order of Shari'a, regarding Sufism as an intensification and interiorization of its ethos.

True Sufism, for Gangohī, is so intertwined with proper conduct that the very possibility of attaining a mystical state (*ḥāl*) "depends entirely on the piety and morals of the individual in question."⁵² His esteem for personal piety was such that he had little tolerance for antinomian strains among the Sufis of the past, hence his attack on one of the towering icons of early Sufism, Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 922).⁵³ To one query about al-Ḥallāj, Gangohī responds tersely, "Mansur Hallaj was arrogant, and his execution was necessary."⁵⁴ Elsewhere he condemns the tendency for Sufis to believe that the Shari'a does not apply to them, a belief which renders one a "total unbeliever" (*kāfir mutlaq*) and angers God.⁵⁵

While many Sufi ritual actions were proscribed, Gangohī did not deny their efficacy. In fact, he believed they must be regulated all the more diligently

precisely *because* of their efficacy. He did not dwell in a disenchanted universe; rather, he insisted that these ritual actions had been adulterated on the popular level through mass patronage from both Sufis and non-Sufis, and from both Hindus and Muslims. Gangohī believed strongly in the mysterious powers of ‘effulgence’ (*faiḍ*) that emanate from the tombs of saints, but objected that the masses do not have the insight to understand the nature of effulgence and tend to mistake the spiritual rewards of pilgrimage (*ziyārat*) as something that comes from the saint himself rather than from God alone, a form of *shirk*. Thus one inquirer wishes to know whether effulgence (*faiḍ*) “can be acquired at the shrines of the saints, and if so, in what form?” Gangohī replies, “Effulgence can be experienced at the shrines of saints, but it is never permissible to sanction this for the masses . . . For the people who patronize the shrine, then, in this manner the abundance of effulgence can be attained according to one’s capabilities, but for the masses, to explain these matters is only to open up the door to idolatry and polytheism.”⁵⁶

While Gangohī affirmed the existence of saintly miracles (*kharq-i ‘ādat*, *karāmāt*), again he asserted that, on a popular level, the masses are likely to believe mistakenly that the miracle originates from the saint himself rather than from God alone.⁵⁷ Likewise, Gangohī denounced the gullibility of the masses in believing just about any miracle tale of the great *pīrs*. “Ignorant people often misunderstand the tales of the great ones, and even if some of them are true, they do not understand those and might be made to say ecstatic utterances (*shaṭḥiyāt*) the meaning of which they do not know. Do not accept them — remain silent about them. Any matters that are contrary to the rules of the Sharī‘a should be rejected, or one should remain silent about them.”⁵⁸ While he confirms the veracity of miracles and that *faiḍ* surrounds the tombs of the saints, Gangohī vehemently condemns any tomb-related practices that may result in *shirk*.

Gangohī’s disdain for popular interpretations of Sufi practices arises in part through their alleged adulteration from Hindu and Christian influence. Gangohī fashioned himself as a self-styled purifier of Sufism from the corrupting influence of Hinduism. One can argue that the Deobandis internalized the modern reifications of ‘Hindu’ and ‘Muslim’ along sectarian lines.⁵⁹ Indeed, Gangohī wrote and taught in an agonistic sectarian milieu, one typified by the many heated public debates between Deobandis and Christian missionaries, Hindu nationalists and various sectarian leaders that hardened religious boundaries.⁶⁰ A famous debate (*munāẓara*) in 1876–77 between Gangohī’s colleague Muḥammad Qāsim Nānautvī and representatives of the Arya Samaj, a Hindu reformist movement, reveals the extent to which these identities had become objectified.⁶¹ With new audiences among the literate middle classes and new technologies for communication in the form of print,

these identities could be easily packaged, exported and consumed, helping to form a transnational, pan-Islamic identity in the nineteenth century. Gangohī lived through a period of increasing ‘objectification’ of Indian religiosity that fashioned rigid, ossified boundaries between communities. Towards the end of his life, Gangohī discouraged Muslims from doing business with Hindus, urged Muslims not to attend Arya Samaj lectures and rallies, and criticized Muslims who retained trappings of ‘Hindu’ culture and lifestyles, whether in dress, hair styles or even in the use of brass instead of copper for containers.⁶² This aversion to all things Hindu included Christians and Jews as well. One of his *fatāwa* rejects the practice of kissing tombs, ostensibly not because kissing tombs is forbidden from an Islamic legal standpoint, but because “Kissing tombs is the practice of the Jews and Christians, and is thus *ḥarām*.”⁶³ One *fatwa* not only prohibited Muslim parents from sending students to English schools where they may sing patriotic British songs or Christian hymns, but declared that singing such songs and hymns is an act of *kufr*.⁶⁴ A similar *fatwa* banned the wearing of ‘Hindu’ and English clothing.⁶⁵

Challenging the Master: Gangohī and Imdādullah

We can draw Gangohī’s critique of Sufism into starker terms by comparing his work to that of his revered master, Ḥājī Imdādullah al-Makkī. Not only did Imdādullah commend many tomb-based ritual practices to his students, he also offers detailed directions for effecting specific mystical states in the presence of a saint’s tomb. That Imdādullah spoke of receiving an initiation into Sufism from Sayyid Aḥmad Barelwi himself, whom he saw in a dream standing beside the Prophet, encapsulates this tension, revealing how Imdādullah, like Gangohī, was heir to conflicting intellectual legacies.⁶⁶ Imdādullah not only adopted techniques of visualizing the body and controlling the breath that derived to some extent from Yogic techniques (of which Gangohī would surely disapprove)⁶⁷ but these were channeled to Imdādullah through his study of the Chishtī Ṣābirī master ‘Abd al-Quddūs Gangohī (d. 1537),⁶⁸ the very shaykh and ancestor of Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī whose tomb ceremonies the latter Gangohī attempted to put an end to.⁶⁹

Born in 1817 to a scholarly family in Thana Bhavan, Imdādullah traveled to Delhi in 1833 to study in the circles of Maulānā Mamlūk ‘Alī and Maulānā Muḥammad Ishāq Dihlawī, a pupil of Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz.⁷⁰ He took *ba‘iat* from Naṣīr al-Dīn Dihlawī, grandson of Rafī‘ al-Dīn Dihlawī, who was a son of Shāh Wālī Allah. Naṣīr al-Dīn, a *khalīfa* of Sayyid Aḥmad Barelwi, initiated Imdādullah into the Naqshbandī *silsila*. Another *khalīfa* of Sayyid Aḥmad’s, Miyaṇjī Nūr Muḥammad Jhanjhanāwī (d. 1845), initiated Imdādullah into the Chishtī Ṣābirī *silsila*.⁷¹ As mentioned previously, he took up arms against the British in 1857 and fled to Mecca in 1859, whence he continued to teach

students from afar and where he lived out the rest of his life, until his death in 1899.⁷²

Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī and Muḥammad Qāsim Nānautvī were Imdādullah's disciples, along with many other luminaries of the Deoband school, including Ashraf 'Alī Thānvī and Ḥasan Aḥmad Madanī. Gangohī described his own devotion to Imdādullah in the language of 'annihilation of the self in one's shaykh' (*fanā fi-sh shaikh*): "For three years the face of Imdādullah was in my heart and I did nothing without asking him first . . . Then, for three years the face of the Prophet was in my heart . . . Then there existed the rank of spiritual realization (*iḥsān ka martabah*)."⁷³ What made him diverge from his master in so many respects? How do we reconcile Imdādullah's own support for tomb-based Sufism with Gangohī's critique of it, and how do we reconcile Gangohī's own unflagging devotion to Imdādullah with his judgments against the very practices that Imdādullah advocated?

Before exploring this question, it is necessary first to discern exactly how Imdādullah's own Sufism diverged so dramatically from his pupil's. Here I will discuss the practice of achieving visionary states using bodily discipline and meditative techniques in the vicinity of tombs. One technique that Imdādullah deploys, *istikbāra*, entails sleeping or meditating, often in the precincts of a tomb, for the purpose of gaining knowledge and guidance in the form of the veridical dream (*ruyā*).⁷⁴ Reformists have typically rejected this technique even though it was advocated by major Sufis such as Ruzbihan Baqlī.⁷⁵ Moreover, this practice has a long pedigree in Chishtī Sufi circles, of which Gangohī was a descendant. Shāh Kalīm Allah Jahanabadī of Delhi (d. 1729), often credited with 'reviving' the Chishtī *silsila* in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by making it more palatable to the 'Ulamā', was an advocate of certain techniques of *istikbāra*. In his *Kashkul-i Kalīmī* Shah Kalīm Allah recommended a "*zikr* for an unveiling (*kashf*) at tombs" as a reliable means for a disciple to communicate with the soul of one's deceased shaykh.⁷⁶

In his treatise "The Brilliance of Hearts" (*Ḍiyā al-Qulūb*), Ḥājī Imdādullah describes various techniques for the practice of *istikbāra*.⁷⁷ The first, "A Method for *Istikbāra* Prayer" explains how meditating at a tomb with the right intention and the right bodily demeanor will achieve the desired visionary insight:

First, to begin by taking a precise look at the practice of *istikbāra*, in *istikbāra* sleep is not necessary; tranquility of the heart is sufficient. If time is not available then simply pray and in this manner perform two prostrations with the intention (*niyya*) of experiencing the *istikbāra*. In the first prostration, after saying "Praise be to God!" say "O God!" And in the second prostration, say "O God!"

A lengthy *duʿā* in Arabic follows in which the seeker entreats God directly for blessings (*barakāt*).⁷⁸ Imdādullah notes, finally, that the seeker can repeat these and other formulas for up to six nights, though ultimately it is “up to God whether that which is intended comes to pass.”⁷⁹

Elsewhere Imdādullah offers more concise prescriptions for effecting a vision (*kashf*) through meditative practices and sleeping near the tombs of shaykhs. Oral recitation of prescribed formulas is an essential ingredient in effecting the desired vision. One section, “A Method for a Vision of Souls and Angels,” is designed for ascertaining knowledge from deceased individuals or angels:

The devotee should emphatically recite via a thousand rhythmic beats (*ḍarb*): ‘Praise be to God’ to his right, ‘O Holy God’ to his left, ‘Lord of the Angels’ towards the sky, and ‘O Soul’ towards his heart, and then facing the intended direction, he will meet the intended soul or spirit. In dreaming or in wakefulness, this meeting will take place by means of a thousand recitations.⁸⁰

Other sections offer *dhikr* formulas to achieve visions tailored to specific needs (such as curing the sick or ascertaining knowledge of the future) or specific places (recitations at tombs). A “*Dhikr* for a Vision at Tombs” recommends a series of formulas for acquiring knowledge about or from a deceased master:

First, say ‘O Lord’ for twenty-one rhythmic beats, and then recite ‘O Spirit’ towards the sky, ‘O Spirit’ over the tomb and ‘O Spirit of the Spirit’ towards the heart. God willing, in dreaming or in wakefulness, you will gain knowledge of the state of the deceased. There is an additional way. First, after sitting near the tomb, recite the Fatiha over the deceased and then say ‘Bring a vision, O Light’ towards the sky, and say ‘Bring a vision, O Light’ towards the heart, and over the tomb, and then face in the direction of the heart.⁸¹

Elsewhere Hājī Imdādullah prescribes “A Method for Discovering a Spiritual Link with a Living or Dead Saint (*Abl-i Allah*)”:

This method is as follows: If he is alive, then sit together with him, and if he is dead, sit together with his tomb. Then empty yourself of all spiritual bonds and then pray in the palace of the Knower of the Unknown, saying “O Omniscient One! O Knowing One! O Manifest One! Make me knowledgeable and tell me of his inner states. And facing in the direction of his spirit, after a moment, your own spirit will be given over to his.”⁸²

Readers of the *Ḍiyā al-Qulūb* are bound to notice how brief and often even terse these sections are. Throughout the text Hājī Imdādullah

emphasizes the importance of *niyya* and *maqṣūd*, both denoting the pious ‘intention’ of the practitioner, implying that these formulas are not sufficient in and of themselves but are in fact heuristic devices, or the merest outlines of techniques for achieving visionary states. Two points are worth noting here. First, it seems that to understand these formulas fully, one would need the oral exposition of a living Sufi master, and in this manner one might guess that Imdādullah sought to counteract what Ernst has called the ‘publication of the secret’, namely how modern printing has eroded, but certainly not replaced, the traditional person-to-person model for the transmission of Sufi knowledge.⁸³ Second, if the technical details of these formulas have been pared down to the barest essentials, it points to the increasing importance of personal morality for the fulfillment of their purpose or the attainment of visions.

Compared to Imdādullah, Gangohī articulates a far more externally rule-bound ontology, one in which the presence of good intention (*niyya*) will neither augment the fulfillment of a visionary formula nor cancel or diminish the error of a blameworthy act. For instance, one *mustaftī* asks “if one utters words of infidelity (*kalimāt-i kufr*) if the heart intends well, is this act *kufr* in the eyes of God?” Gangohī answers that any such action or words are *kufr*, even if the heart means well, unless the individual commits them under duress (*ikrah*).⁸⁴ To state any words of infidelity, even if one does not actually believe that statement, is *kufr*. *Niyya* is of little consequence here.⁸⁵

Three closing observations about the differences between Imdādullah and Gangohī are relevant here. First, Imdādullah and Gangohī were united in their belief that absolute moral purity in belief and pious intentions in ritual practice were the most important elements of Sufism. Gangohī, unlike his master, adopted an alarmist stance towards the perceived demise of Islam in India and rejected the whole social edifice on which Sufi practice had been built, reducing it almost entirely to matters of personal morality and devotion to one’s shaykh.

Secondly, the shrine-based practices that Imdādullah describes in the *Ḍiyā al-Qulūb* are still firmly within the domain of the *pīr-murīd* relationship that Gangohī regarded so highly; they just happen to take place at tombs. Gangohī approved and even encouraged certain practices of visualization, not altogether unlike the one’s depicted in *Ḍiyā al-Qulūb*, such as the technique of *taṣarruf*, the ‘expenditure’ of the master’s psychic energy on the *murīd*, and the practice of *tawajjuh*, ‘concentration’ of the master’s attention on the *murīd* in order to effect certain states.⁸⁶ For the student there is “no harm” in visualizing the master (*taṣawwur-i shaykh*), so long as it does not entail the creation of amulets and other devices for maintaining visualization.⁸⁷ He echoes this judgment elsewhere when he notes that although Muḥammad

Ismāʿīl forbade the practice, Shah Wālī Allah and Aḥmad Sirhindi approved of it, and notes that it is natural for people to use visualization in thinking.⁸⁸

Third, Imdādullah wrote mostly for an elite audience of fellow Sufis such as the circle of those he had personally initiated. In contrast, as we have seen, Gangohī's *fatāwa* reached a wide readership concerned with issues relevant to the belief and practice of the Muslim masses, for whom *shirk* and *bid'a* were seen as constant temptations. In other words, if Imdādullah's literary persona is an intimately private one, Gangohī's is eminently public. This contrast is brought into clear relief by comparing his *fatāwa* to Gangohī's treatise *Imdād al-Sulūk*. Written in Persian for a comparatively small group of fellow Sufis, long after Persian had ceased to be the *lingua franca* of educated Muslims, this treatise contains almost no discussion of the tomb-based practices that occupy such a prominent place in the *fatāwa*, nor any formulas of the kind we see in *Ḍiyā al-Qulūb*. Rather, *Imdād al-Sulūk* explains stages in the Sufi path, enumerates conventional *dhikr* techniques, and offers advice on the *pīr-murīd* relationship and characteristics of the ideal *shaykh*. Quoting widely from early Sufi masters Abu-l Qāsim al-Junayd (d. 910) and Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 896), he predictably identifies Sharīʿa as the first stage (*maqām*) in the Sufi path, and the goal of the Sufi path as the complete "reformation of the heart" (*qalb ki iṣlāḥ*) through a regimen of disciplinary techniques.⁸⁹ These conditions of the Sufi journey include being in a state of ritual purity, refraining from food beyond what is necessary to live, refraining from excessive talk, seclusion (*khalwat*), mastery of *dhikr*, and commitment to a Sufi *shaykh*.⁹⁰ What is remarkably absent from this treatise, compared to the *fatāwa*, is any lengthy treatment of legal matters pertaining to, or dangers inherent in, popular shrine-based Sufism. The only hint at such issues here is advice to shun "ignorant Sufis" who purport to know more than they really do and repeated warnings that Satan is always waiting to dupe and deceive those on the Sufi path.⁹¹ But the very absence of discussion of popular Sufi practices signals Gangohī's notion of what Sufism is: a striving to purify the self in the journey towards God (*sair ila Llab*).⁹² Composed in Persian and translated into Urdu only at a much later date, *Imdād al-Sulūk* was, by default, written for a far smaller audience of like-minded Sufis who, unlike the masses, had the knowledge to proceed cautiously and prudently along the Sufi path.

Conclusion

In the *Ḍiyā al-Qulūb* Imdādullah wrote about two of his famous Deobandi pupils, "Whoever feels love and devotion towards me should regard Maulvī Rashīd Aḥmad [Nānautvī] Ṣāḥib and Maulvī Muḥammad Qāsim [Nānautvī] Ṣāḥib, in whom the inner and outer perfections are united, as my equal, or in fact as residing at a higher level than me. Although on the surface the matter

is quite the opposite [given that Imdādullah was their *shaykh*], they stand in my place and I stand in theirs. And their presence yields such rewards that such men are not to be found in this age, and from the blessings of their service, effulgence (*faid*) is abundant, and the Sufi path (which is contained in this book) will not be bereft of their presence, God willing.”⁹³

The parity with which Imdādullah regarded his star pupils helps to explain how Gangohī was willing and able to depart from his example on so many points. Perhaps we can best understand their relation as two altogether different responses to the problems that beset the Muslim body politic in the nineteenth century. Imdādullah was by no means ignorant of or oblivious towards the effect of colonial modernity on the piety and prestige of Indian Muslims, but Gangohī seems to have interpreted the crisis of colonial Islam in starker and much more urgent terms, a problem that for him demanded more drastic solutions than those offered by his master.

I have explored how Gangohī’s work exemplifies a larger trend in reformist Sufism that retains, perhaps even intensifies, some Sufi devotions such as the importance of the *pīr-murīd* relationship while jettisoning popular Sufi ritual and practice. This strain of reformist thought ‘intellectualizes’ Sufism, elevating the importance of Sufi spiritual insight while disavowing its social dimensions. Such a reformist impulse in the founders of Deoband is best understood as part of a larger trend in Islamic movements of the colonial era, many of which vigorously critiqued Sufi practice from standpoints nevertheless infused with Sufi belief and piety.

Endnotes

1. One could cite, alongside many other similar articles, Michael Fathers’ “At the Birthplace of the Taliban,” *Time*, 21 September 2001, and Jeffrey Goldberg’s “Inside Jihad U.: The Education of a Holy Warrior,” *The New York Times*, 25 June 2000. One of the more balanced and thorough journalistic accounts comes from Ahmed Rashid, who concludes that the Taliban took the ideas of Deoband “to an extreme which the original Deobandis would never have recognized.” See Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Islam, Oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia* (London: I. B. Tauris and Company, 2002), 88. The Taliban emerged partly out of the Jamiat Ulema-i Islam, a political movement comprised largely of Deoband-trained scholars that broke off in 1945 from an older Deoband-based political group, Jamiat Ulema-i Hind, because of the latter’s support of the Indian Congress and opposition to a separate Muslim state.

2. Barbara Metcalf, “‘Traditionalist’ Islamic Activism: Deoband, Tablighis and Talibs,” (Leiden: ISIM, 2002).

3. Muḥammad ‘Ashiq Ilāhi, *Tazkīrat al-Rashīd* (Karachi: Maktaba Baḥr al-‘Ulūm, 1978), 40–62. The Chishtīyya has two branches: the Nizāmīyya and Šābirīyya. The Nizāmīyya stems from Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā’ and the Šābirī branch stems from ‘Ala al-Dīn ‘Alī Šābirī, both pupils of Farīd al-Dīn Ganj-i Shakkār. The historical record on the Nizāmī

Chishtīs is far more profuse than that of the Šābirīs. The most important Šābirī Chishtī prior to the nineteenth century was ‘Abd al-Quddūs Gangohī, ancestor of the Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī who is the subject of this article. In the nineteenth century, Hājī Imdādullah al-Makkī, the latter Gangohī’s master, became the singlemost influential Šābirī master since ‘Abd al-Quddūs. See Carl Ernst and Bruce Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love: The Chishti Order in South Asia and Beyond* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992), 118–119.

4. Muḥammad ‘Ashiq Ilāhī, *Tazkīrat al-Rashīd*, 88–96.

5. *Ibid.*, 40.

6. Sayyid Mahboob Rizvi, *History of the Dar al-Ulum Deoband*, Vol. 1 (Deoband: Maulānā Abdul Haq, 1980), 97. Another account seems to challenge this one, suggesting Gangohī was not technically a *khalīfa* at all; according to *Imdād al-Mushtaq* Imdādullah designated two kinds of successors, those on whom he bestowed authority to initiate others (*khilafat*) and those he permitted to propagate religion on his behalf (*tabligh-i dīn*). Gangohī was part of the latter group. Cited in Ernst and Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love*, 119–120. These conflicting accounts may not be easily resolved, and point to the extent to which the legacies of the early Deobandis remains contentious.

7. Sayyid Mahboob Rizvi, *History of the Dar al-Ulum Deoband*, 97. However, Metcalf notes that stories of Gangohī’s and Imdādullah’s valiant struggles against British rule only appear in sources after 1920, suggesting a nationalist bent in Deobandi historiography. See *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860–1900* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), 82.

8. Barbara Metcalf, “Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī,” in *Dictionnaire biographique des savants et grandes figures du monde musulman périphérique du XIXe siècle à nos jours*, ed. Marc Gaborieau (Paris: Programme de recherches interdisciplinaires sur le monde musulman périphérique, 1992), 21–22. For a detailed discussion of the Dars-i Nizami curriculum that Deoband adapted, see Francis Robinson, *The ‘Ulamā’ of Farangi Mahall and Islamic Culture in South Asia* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2005).

9. Scott Alan Kugle, “Framed, Blamed and Renamed: The Recasting of Islamic Jurisprudence in Colonial South Asia,” *Modern Asian Studies* 35, 2 (2001): 261–262.

10. Quoted in Asaf A. A. Fyzee, *Outlines of Muhammadan Law* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), 37.

11. Muhammad Khalid Masud, “Apostasy and Judicial Separation in British India,” in *Islamic Legal Interpretation: Muftīs and their Fatwas*, eds. Muhammad Khalid Masud, Brinkley Messick and David S. Powers (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 197.

12. *Hedayat, a Commentary on the Mussulman Laws*, trans. Charles Hamilton (London: T. Bensley, 1791), xxxi. For such a historically consequential text, the *Hidaya* of Burhan al-Din Marghinani (d. 1197) has received minimal scholarly treatment. For one account, see Y. Meron, “Marghinani, His Method and His Legacy,” *Islamic Law and Society* 9, 3 (2002): 410–416.

13. Scott Alan Kugle, “Framed, Blamed and Renamed,” 270.

14. Muhammad Khalid Masud, “Apostasy and Judicial Separation in British India,” 195.

15. Asaf A. A. Fyzee, “Muhammadan Law in India,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 5, 4 (1963): 405.

16. Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The ‘Ulamā’ in contemporary Islam: custodians of change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 25.

17. Barbara Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India, Deoband: 1860–1900* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), 50.

18. See Alan M. Guenther, “Hanafi *Fiqh* in Mughal India: The *Fatāwa-i Alamgiri*,” in *India’s Islamic Traditions, 711–1750*, ed. Richard M. Eaton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 214–15.

19. For the Islamicate world broadly speaking, see for example Nehemia Levtzion and John O. Voll, *Eighteenth-Century Renewal and Reform in Islam* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987). For India, see Kenneth W. Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

20. Filippo Osella and Carolina Osella, "Introduction: Islamic Reformism in South Asia," *Modern Asian Studies* 42, 2/3 (2008): 247–248.

21. For example, in the *fatāwa* Gangohī speaks often of *islāh-i imān*, 'reforming the faith.'

22. The best general study of Sayyid Aḥmad's movement is Harlan O. Pearson's *Islamic Reform and Revival in Nineteenth-century India* (New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2008) which until recently remained an unpublished dissertation.

23. Muhammad Hedayetullah, *Sayyid Ahmad: A Study of the Religious Reform Movement of Sayyid Ahmad of Rā'e Bareli* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1970), 44, 115–118. There are numerous Urdu biographies of Sayyid Aḥmad, many verging on hagiography. See, for example, Abulhasan 'Alī Nadvi, *Ṣirāt-i Sayyid Aḥmad Shabīd* (Lucknow: Majlis-i Taḥqīqat wa Nashriyyat-i Islām, 1977) and Ghulam Rasul Mahr, *Sayyid Aḥmad Shabīd* (Lahore: Kitab Manzil, 1954–1956).

24. For a discussion of the impact of print on this movement, see Marc Gaborieau's "Late Persian, Early Urdu: The Case of 'Wahhabi' Literature (1818–1857)," in *Confluence of Cultures: French Contributions to Indo-Persian Studies*, ed. Françoise Nalini Delvoye (New Delhi: Manohar, 1994), and the same author's "Sufism in the First Indian Wahhabi Manifesto: Siratū'l Mustaqīm by Isma'īl Shahīd and 'Abdu'l Hayy," in *The Making of Indo-Persian Culture: Indian and French Studies*, eds. Muzaffar Alam, Françoise Delvoye Nalini and Marc Gaborieau (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 2000).

25. The *Ṣirāt al-Mustaḳīm* contains, among other things, a theory of the 'path of sainthood' (*rah-i wilāyat*) compared to the 'path of prophecy' (*rah-i nubuwat*) and a detailed analysis of *zīkr* techniques in the Qādirī, Naqshbandī and Chishtī *silsilas* alongside a critique of Sufi practices surrounding the reverence of saints. See Marc Gaborieau, "Sufism in the First Indian Wahhabi Manifesto."

26. For a summary of these points, see Muḥammad Ismā'īl, *Taqwīyyat al-Imān* (Multan: Kutub Khana-i Majidiya, n.d.), 14–17. Each type of *shirk* forms the subject of an individual chapter in this treatise.

27. *Ibid.*, 55–56.

28. *Ibid.*, 39.

29. A standard litany of such practices in the *Taqwīyyat al-Imān* is the following: "The observance of the following practices are strictly reserved for God alone: prostration, bowing in prayer (*rukū'*), standing with the arms folded, spending money in someone's name, fasting in someone's name, traveling to another's home and in the guise of a pilgrim, calling out the name of one's ruler while traveling, or doing acts such as slaying animals along the way, circumambulating the shrine, prostrating in front of it, carrying animals, making supplications, covering the grave with a sheet, uttering a prayer (*du'ā*) while standing at its threshold, making entreaties in religious or profane matters concerning this world and the world to come, kissing a stone, pressing one's mouth or chest against the wall, uttering a prayer while gripping the sheet over the grave, lighting lamps around it, working as an attendant and doing related practices such as dusting off the lamps, laying out carpets, offering water to visitors for the purposes of ablution, pouring water from the well over the body with the notion that it is blessed, setting it aside for absent friends, taking leave of the shrine to walk away backwards while facing it, showing deference to the forest (*jāngal ke ādāb*) near the shrine, refraining from slaying animals nearby or from cutting trees or pulling up grasses growing there. All of these practices are reserved by his servants

for the worship of God alone . . . It is established that such actions qualify as *shirk*.” Muḥammad Ismā‘īl, *Taqwīyyat al-Imān*, 15.

30. Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī, *Fatāwa-yi Rashīdiyya* (Karachi: Educational Press Pakistan, 1985), 83.

31. *Ibid.*, 78.

32. *Ibid.*, 79.

33. Faḥl al-Ḥāq Khairābādī was, like Sayyid Aḥmad and Muḥammad Ismā‘īl, a disciple of Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz. Khairābādī defended the notion of saintly intercession against Muḥammad Ismā‘īl’s assertions that believing in intercession was tantamount to *shirk*. He also vilified Muḥammad Ismā‘īl for his alleged slandering of the Prophet Muḥammad. See Ayesha Jalal, *Partisans of Allah: Jihad in South Asia* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2008), 80–81.

34. Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī, *Fatāwa-yi Rashīdiyya*, 113.

35. *Ibid.*, 100.

36. *Ibid.*, 140–142. Gangohī states that the act of seeking aid (*isti‘ānat*) has three meanings: the first is to utter a prayer (*du‘ā*) to God, asking him to perform some deed, which is unanimously accepted as permissible; the second is to utter a plea for anyone who is deceased to perform some deed, whether at the tomb or not, which is unequivocally *shirk*; the third is to go to tombs and ask the deceased to say a prayer (*du‘ā*) on one’s behalf, which is also *shirk*. The notion of intercession (*shafā‘at*), Gangohī states, encompasses the latter two forms of seeking aid, both of which are impermissible.

37. *Ibid.*, 104.

38. *Ibid.*, 84.

39. Esther Peskes has attempted to argue to the contrary that Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb was not as dogmatically and resolutely anti-Sufi as contemporary scholars have interpreted him to be. See Esther Peskes, “The Wahhabiyya and Sufism in the Eighteenth Century,” Frederick de Jong and Bernd Radtke, eds. *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics* (Leiden: Brill, 1999). Scott Kugle, in a rejoinder to Peskes, remains unconvinced. See his *Sufis and Saints’ Bodies: Mysticism, Corporeality, and Sacred Power in Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2007), 280–281. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, besides the Wahhabis, the Farā‘īdī movement in Bengal was also stridently anti-Sufi. This simplistic anti-Sufism was appropriated in the twentieth century by some Muslim nationalists in South Asia, Maududi foremost among them. See Marc Gaborieau, “Critiquing the Sufis: The Debate in Early-Nineteenth Century India,” in *Islamic Mysticism Contested*.

40. Marc Gaborieau, “Le Culte des Saints Musulmans en tant que Rituel: Controverses Juridiques,” *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 85 (1994): 85–98.

41. Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī, *Fatāwa-yi Rashīdiyya*, 220.

42. *Ibid.*, 115–16. See also pg. 131 for a similar judgment on ‘urs.

43. *Ibid.*, 82. See a similar judgment on pg. 69, where he also prohibits kissing tombs.

44. *Ibid.*, 38.

45. *Ibid.*, 59.

46. *Ibid.*, 41.

47. *Ibid.*, 142–3.

48. *Ibid.*

49. *Ibid.*, 166.

50. *Ibid.*, 214–17.

51. *Ibid.*

52. *Ibid.*, 227.

53. In perhaps the most famous execution in the history of Sufism, Hallaj was allegedly put to death for his ecstatic utterance (*shabḥ*) *Anā al-ḥāq*, 'I am the Truth/Ultimate Reality'. This was in fact one of several accusations against Hallaj, including the claim of divine lordship (*rubūbiyah*), incarnationism (*ḥulūl*), divinity (*ilābiyah*) and prophethood (*nubuwwah*). As Ernst has shown, the record of his trial is inseparable from its tenth century political context, namely the suspicion that Hallaj and other contemporary Sufis were dangerous crypto-Shi'is. To say that he was executed merely for ecstatic utterances misses the larger picture. See Carl Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism* (Albany: State University of New York, 1985), 107–112.

54. Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī, *Fatāwa-yi Rashīdiyya*, 107–108. Gangohī was by no means unique among Sufis in his criticism of Hallaj. In regards to the execution of Hallaj, Abū Hamīd al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) quipped, "the killing of him who utters something of this kind is better in the religion of God than the resurrection of ten others." Carl Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism*, 14.

55. Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī, *Fatāwa-yi Rashīdiyya*, 82.

56. *Ibid.*, 104.

57. *Ibid.*, 105.

58. *Ibid.*, 107.

59. See the introduction to *Beyond Turk and Hindu: rethinking religious identities in Islamicate South Asia*, eds. David Gilmartin and Bruce Lawrence (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000).

60. Avril A. Powell's *Muslims and Missionaries in Pre-Mutiny India* (London: Curzon, 1993) examines the role of the *munāẓara* in the formation of sectarian religious identities in the nascent Indian public sphere prior to the explosion of print-based interreligious polemics.

61. See Muḥammad Qāsim Nānautvī, *Mubāḥisab-yi Shāhjahānpūr* (Karachi: Dār al-Sha'at, 1977).

62. Barbara Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India*, 153.

63. Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī, *Fatāwa-yi Rashīdiyya*, 69.

64. *Ibid.*, 54–55.

65. *Ibid.*, 70.

66. *Imdād al-Mushtāq*, 26. Imdādullah stated, "I was three years old when Sayyid Aḥmad took me into his lap and bestowed *ba'iat* upon me." Quoted in Laṭīf Allah, *Anfās-i Imdādiyya* (Karachi: Nashr al-Ma'arif, 1995), 58. The author of *Anfās-i Imdādiyya* remarks, "The appearance of Sayyid Aḥmad left a profound effect on his subconscious mind and in the depths of his heart."

67. He did, however, approve of the apparently Yoga-derived practice of regulating the breath (*pās-i anfās*). Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī, *Fatāwa-yi Rashīdiyya*, 220.

68. Scott Kugle, *Sufis and Saints' Bodies*, 243–48.

69. Barbara Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India*, 79.

70. Latifullah, *Anfās-i Imdādiyya*, 50.

71. *Ibid.*, 61–62. Metcalf suggests that Imdādullah emphasized his Chishtī lineage above the others in part because the Chishtī tradition of disengagement from politics was appropriate for the post-1857 context. See Barbara Metcalf, "Imdādu'llah Thanawī," *Dictionnaire biographique*, 13.

72. Barbara Metcalf, "Imdādullah Thānvī," *Dictionnaire biographique*, 13.

73. Quoted in Barbara Metcalf, *Islamic Revival*, 184.

74. *Istikhāra* is not necessarily performed in the vicinity of a tomb; in fact, it can be performed while sleeping or meditating in a mosque as well. But nearly all of Imdādullah's formulas require that the seeker is soliciting knowledge or insight from a deceased Sufi

master while situated at his tomb. Unfortunately, Gangohī does not make his views of this practice clear in the *fatāwa*.

75. T. Fahd, “*Istikhbāra*,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 259–60.

76. Nile Green, “The Religious and Cultural Roles of Dreams and Visions in Islam,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 13, 3 (2003): 307.

77. For a detailed discussion of this treatise, see Scott Kugle’s chapter “Body Revived: The Heart of Ḥājī Imdādullah,” in *Sufis and Saints’ Bodies*.

78. Ḥājī Imdādullah al-Makki, *Kulliyāt Imdādiyya* (Karachi: Dar al-Shā‘at, 1976), 62.

79. *Ibid.*

80. *Ibid.*, 44.

81. *Ibid.*, 45.

82. *Ibid.*, 55.

83. See Carl W. Ernst, “Sufism, Islam, and Globalization in the Contemporary World: Methodological Reflections on a Changing Field of Study,” in *Islamic Spirituality and the Contemporary World*, ed. Azizan Baharuddin (Kuala Lumpur: Centre for Civilisational Dialogue, University of Malaya, 2007).

84. Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī, *Fatāwa-yi Rashīdiyya*, 43–44.

85. *Ibid.*, 54.

86. Barbara Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India*, 172–75.

87. Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī, *Fatāwa-yi Rashīdiyya*, 217. Here, alas, is one instance in which Gangohī departs from Muḥammad Ismā‘īl and Sayyid Aḥmad. A story told to bolster Sayyid Aḥmad’s reformist credentials tells of an early encounter between the young Sayyid Aḥmad and Shāh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz. The elder master began to instruct the young iconoclast in the technique of *taṣawwur-i shaykh*, at which point Sayyid Aḥmad asks what the difference is between visualizing one’s master and idolatry. S. A. A. Rizvi, *Shah ‘Abd al-‘Aziz: Puritanism, Sectarian Polemics and Jihad* (Canberra: Ma‘rifat Publishing House, 1982), 475–476.

88. *Ibid.*, 217–218.

89. Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī, *Imdād al-Sulūk* (Deoband: Dār al-Kitāb Deoband, 2005), 99. It makes sense that Gangohī would take Junayd as his principle source of inspiration in this treatise. Among early Sufis, Junayd emphasized purification of the self and sobriety (*ṣaḥw*) as fundamental traits of the Sufi path, and believed in a ‘spiritual elect’ whom God had endowed with special capacities for affirming *tawḥīd* through *fanā’*. See Ahmet Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 15–18.

90. Rashīd Aḥmad Gangohī, *Imdād al-Sulūk*, 78–140.

91. *Ibid.*, 57–58.

92. *Ibid.*, 155–156.

93. Ḥājī Imdādullah, *Kulliyāt-i Imdādiyya*, 72.

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